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**Barn, sted, tid, bevegelse: på sporet av litteratur om romlig teori og dens relevans for små barn
(Children, place, time, movement: tracing the literature on spatial theories and their relevance for
young children)**

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IN

Myrstad, A., Sverdrup, T. & Helgesen, M.B. (2018) Barn skaper sted – sted skaper barn. (Children create place – place creates children). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget 2018.

What does it mean that we are in the north? This was a question that came up again and again when I met with some of the authors and contributors of this book at a workshop at University of Tromsø. Surrounded by mountains and the sea, searching the sky each evening for the Northern Lights, the data shared during this workshop was replete with snow piles, forests, and reindeer. As we shared and discussed this data in this particular place, the group asked each other “*what does it mean that we are in the north?*” Taking this question back with me to my own place in the world, northern England, I continued to wonder, *what does place mean for early childhood education practice and policy?* The place I live has a rich industrial heritage, of coal and steel, shaped itself by the geology and geography of this part of the world. This industrial past has deep running implications in the present day for culture, economy and identity. Most of my research is with children who live in northern English town and cities, which are built up and architecturally complex, with older industrial buildings repurposed for new uses. England is an intensely seasonal place, with cold winters, warmer summers and, as I write in Autumn, thick layers of multi coloured leaves carpeting the ground, which will slowly turn to a thick brown sludge over the pavements as Autumn turns to winter. My town lies on the edge of the Peak District national park, though many in the communities I research with rarely access this countryside. My place is far from the sea: a trip to the seaside is a rare and exciting experience for most families here. Wherever we are in the world, as researchers and teachers, we can ask, *what does this place mean for early childhood policy and practice? How does place shape children and how do children shape place here? And now?*

There are many ways we could begin to answer such a question. We could think about how early experiences of place and materials shape how children can imagine other places. Scholars have written about the importance of first homes and local streets and communities of childhood (Christensen, 2003; Mackey, 2010; Malouf, 1985). Malouf describes knowing a first home “from my body outwards” (Malouf, in Mackey, 2010, p. 328) and Rasmussen and Smidt (2003) have described how the feel and sensations of a neighbourhood become part of children, just as much as children’s

presence becomes part of a neighbourhood. Embodied experiences of these places act as a starting point, a frame of reference for imagining and experiencing the rest of the world.

In her writing on place and early reading, Mackey (2010) describes the 'foot knowledge' (p.329) gathered from local places she spent her childhood; such knowledge of place, and moving in place is a starting point for children to begin deep-reading, that is the kind of reading that can transport a reader to another world.

[Children] need to prime their imaginations to encompass places and events they will never see in their own small, real-life existences. How do they learn to do that? What lets the flat rectangles of the page morph into stories that move through their minds in multi-dimensional ways?.....Many children learn to read just at the same time they are beginning to move through their own world more significantly. They have graduated from wheels; they interpret some of their world through the action of their own feet.

Mackey, 2010, p.325

As Mackey (2010) shows, we must always imagine other worlds in relation to the ones we have experienced. However, at the same time as attending to the micro, to the sensorial, in terms of what place means for young children, we must not overlook the macro or the political. The geopolitical past and present of a place has many implications for how different childhood and parenting practices are permitted, validated or rejected. As Lefebvre (1991) points out "(social) space is a (social) product" (p.26). Space is produced by the practices that take place there, and these spatial practices are informed by social-geo-political-material realities. Increasingly early childhood scholars are considering how both the material and the discursive nature of places shape "how and what we might say or do, or not say or do" (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.5). For example, Nxumalo et al. (2011) describe the thick geographical, social and cultural meanings and contexts that shape lunchtime in a childcare centre in Nunavik. By laying the history of repression of Inuit identities, which has included the pathologisation of eating 'country food', alongside the materiality of children sitting in yellow plastic chairs as food is spooned into their mouths, they show pedagogical practices "building silently on the structural conditions of racism while evaporating the very categories of their recognisability" (p.216).

From Mackey's (2010) description of reading *Nancy Drew* as a Newfoundland child (with personal experiences of a very different kind of rural landscape), and Nxumalo et al's (2011) description of the materiality of normalized Westernised feeding practices in Nunavit early childhood centres, place shapes children and children shape place in multiple ways. Drawing on Ingold's work in particular, this book asks, for a young child, what are the implications of *dwelling* in such an environment? When a child is two or three years old, what are the potentials for *wayfaring* in such a place? Places are experienced in the here and now, as the snow falls or melts, or the sun shines, or the northern lights glow or not. Yet there are also historical trajectories and meanings attached to place and experience over time. As Massey (2005) would put it, we are all "negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres)" (p.140). As I will argue in this chapter, the connecting thread between past and present experiences in place is movement. As Ingold (2007) writes, life can be conceptualised as lines of movement, because "as walking, talking and gesticulating creatures, human beings generate lines wherever they go" (p.1).

I share with the contributors of this book an interest in place, and the body experiencing in place, particularly by moving through it. Such an interest in the dynamic, lived, agential role of place, or the more-than-human world, can be traced across an interdisciplinary literature, including geography, anthropology, architecture, social studies of childhood, and new materialism. In this chapter, I will highlight some of this literature, with a particular interest in what these theories can say about materiality of place, the movements of young children, and the kinds of entanglements that could happen when young children and pedagogues gather together in kindergartens or early years settings.

Movement and the making of place

For Ingold (2007), place is conceptualised not as dots or circles on a map, but as points where many lines of movement come together and are concentrated. This understanding of place as dynamic and shifting is shared by geographers including Massey (2005), who critiques the conflation of space with representations of space, such as maps. Such fixed representations, argues Massey, deprive space of its dynamism, and "supresses narrative, stories and trajectories". For example, in drawing a historical journey as a line on a map "a movement is turned into a static line" (p.108). Instead, Massey understands space and time as intrinsically connected. As anything (human or non human) makes a journey, time moves on and space continually changes. Thus, similar to Ingold's (2007)

notion of wayfaring, Massey (2005) insists a traveller is “a participant in its [space’s] continual construction.”

Whilst movement is central to how people experience the world, movement seems to have a distinctive role for young children. Tuan (1977), amongst others (Bartos, 2013; Christensen, 2003; Matthews, 1992) has described children’s experience of place as more meaningful, more sensorial, more deeply engaged in movement and tactility, than that of adults. Christensen (2003) describes this difference by arguing that children foreground emplaced knowledge that arises through being in a place, whilst adults also rely on abstract, generalizable spatial knowledge. Similarly, walking emerges repeatedly in the literature as having a special significance for children (Christensen and Cortés-Morales, 2017; Christensen and Mikkelsen, 2012; Hackett, 2016; McLaren, 2009). For example, Horton et al’s (2014) study of children in their local community stressed the significance of walking as a practice that matters deeply to children. For McLaren (2009) the possibilities for freer movement offered by a hospital atrium were linked to a sense of reduced surveillance, agility and possibility for action.

In summary then, place can be understood through movement, as a shifting, dynamic, spatio-temporal phenomena which is negotiated by inhabitants moment-by-moment. Whilst many of the most significant theorists of place, space and movement have not written explicitly about children, there is a rich potential in scholarship that foregrounds children’s movement as place making, in order to ask, *how does moving through place matter for young children?* The ways in which being in and experiencing place through movement matter to children may be difficult to articulate in words (Horton et al, 2014), yet they still require taking seriously within childhood research (Rautio, 2013).

Being entangled in the material world

Across an inter-disciplinary literature, there is an increasing recognition that humans are neither bounded entities, nor central within their worlds (e.g. Ingold, 2013; Taylor et al, 2012). Ingold describes the entanglement between people and place as a meshwork, through which we “make our way through a world-in-form rather than across its preformed surface” (2008, p.1802). People, animals and things are continuously emerging in a “zone of entanglement”, and Ingold likens this entanglement to weaving. “A world.....that is inhabited is woven from the strands of [things] continually coming-into-being” (2008, p. 1797). Thus, for Ingold, wayfaring is not only about how children experience place, it is “place-making” (2007, p.101).

Non-human objects act within these entanglements too. As children are entangled with place, possibilities for what may happen, emerge in between children, place and things. In work aiming to decentre the human, scholars have urged a recognition of the agency of the more-than-human world (Bennett, 2010; Pickering, 2008). Building on these debates, Ingold (2013) has proposed that agency is an unhelpful world because of the intentionality and control it implies, leading us to try (and to fail) to “express a process of growth and becoming in a language of causation” (p.97). Rather than seeing agency, or cause and effect, in either the human or nonhuman players, Ingold (2013) urges us to move beyond these binaries, and instead consider a dance of animacy, in which people, place and things correspond with each other. This correspondence or “answering the world” (p.108) is a useful way to think about how place, things and children might co-constitute each other, through moving and being in the world.

The concept of place-making highlights the agency of children and their moving bodies to shape place (Myrstad and Sverdrup, forthcoming). For example, Hackett (2016) argues that young children’s paths of movement through the museum shaped place in particular ways, foregrounding and highlighting some aspects of experience, and connecting parts of the social and material together in particular ways. Materials can awaken or spark ideas for children’s play and interactions in place; as such, they are agential or animate. Drawing on a study of children’s outside play, Änggård (2016) shows how different kinds of places become created, imagined and experiencing through children, place and things acting together. These play ideas can be symbolic, such as children building a tiny house from bark and cones, or sensorimotor, such as children sliding together down a rock. Describing a walk with two young girls down to a river, Somerville (2015) describes how “a different configuration of time and space” was created by walking with the girls. As a dip in the dirt drive led to the girls wanting to make mud sculptures, or as the children stopped to pick up each stone scattered along the path to the river, Somerville realised “the spaces and places of our walk are shaped by their stoppings”. In these examples, children’s entanglement with things and places, this “dance of animacy” (Ingold, 2013, p.101), lies at the heart of what places mean to children, and how children shape places.

Remembering and knowing

In her description of walking with video, Sarah Pink (2007) described the role of walking in shifting a community garden from a space largely imagined to a space filled with meaning and memories from

previous visits. Thus, “paths and routes are not simply functional routes that connect one place to another, but are meaningful sensory and imagined places in their own right” (Pink, 2007, p.246). In her analysis of time in a Finnish classroom, Hohti (2016) argues against time “as neutral, equal parameter for all” (p.188). Rather there are multiple ‘nows’ such as the now of the children in the group activity, the now of the misbehaving child, the now of the teacher. By drawing on Massey’s work to make this argument, Hohti shows how time, children and place are inter-connected and mutually produced. Drawing on Massey, she argues that time is not stable because each individual is differently located, “slicing the time-space continuum at different angles”. Each child in this classroom has, to put it another way, taken a different line of wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) through different places, at different times, entangled with different entities, to come to their own version of ‘now’. Again, new materialism cautions us against a human centric notion of memory, affect and meaning invested in places. For example, in their analysis of animacy and rocks, Springgay and Truman (2016) point out that “Stones are only inert when considered anthropocentrically”; their movement, energy and reproduction taking place at a pace that is difficult for humans to discern.

Christensen (2003) spent much of her ethnographic study of children’s experiences of living in cities and villages walking through places with the children. Drawing on her own memories of childhood, she remembers lying in bed recalling the routes and paths she took during the day around her own local area. For children, Christensen stresses the significance of “the understanding that emerges from embodied movement through place” (p.16). The importance of movement for how children remember routes and create ‘mental maps’ (Lynch, 1960) of their world, has been noted by researchers looking at how children experience places including kindergartens (Myrstad and Sverdrup, forthcoming), museums (Hackett, 2016), housing estates (Horton et al, 2014) and local communities (Rasmussen and Smidt, 2003). These forms of knowledge of place are not necessarily easy to articulate in words, but can form an emplaced knowledge held within the body as ‘physical know-how’ (Rasmussen and Smidt, 2003).

An interest in aspects of place that are difficult to articulate in words is also found in non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008) and emotional geographies scholarship (see Blazek, 2015 for an overview of these fields in relation to childhood studies). Places are “emotionally textured” (Milligan et al, 2005, p.57) and, over time, emotions become invested in places, and places can come to evoke emotions (Blazek, 2015). Emotional dimensions of place have implications for what place means for young children, and the possibilities for children’s entanglements with place. The emotional meanings attached to place, from the point of view of children, can be shaped and

develop over time, with both discursive and material dimensions playing a part in how places can become invested with emotion. For example, Brown (2016) describes how the spatial organisation of ability group classes in a school had deep implications for children's sense of belonging within the school community. For lower set pupils, small spaces of belonging or comfort seemed to open up at certain points during the school day, such as the hall when it is empty, and children could imagine "we've got the place to ourselves, me and Ellie" (p.9). In a study of children's experiences of a small New Zealand town, Bartos (2013) describes the role of embodied and sensory emotions in how places become invested in meaning. She argues that the reasons why places are meaningful to children may be lodged in certain smells, tastes, experiences of looking, or ways of moving. Similarly to Horton (2010) and Änggård (2016), Bartos argues that whilst these reasons may not always be articulable in words, embodied and materialised aspects of why things matter to children should not be overlooked in favour of the symbolic or discursive.

Disrupting assumptions about children

From some of the first academic writing about the importance of theorising space (Foucault, 1995; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996), a spatial perspective has long been associated with disruption, subversion and the political. Space is related to the distribution of power, to identity, to surveillance, to colonisation. "The way we imagine space has effects" (Massey, 2005, p.4). Soja (1996) describes a foregrounding of space as a "critical thirding" (p.5), which offers the potential to move away from binary logic and think critically about modernism. Different conceptualisations of space reveal the imposition of one person's line, or map, or way of seeing the world, over another, for example, adults' views of the world imposed over those of children (Christensen, 2003; Hackett and Yamada-Rice, 2015), or Western conceptualisations of the world imposed over indigenous (Ingold, 2007). Rasmussen (2004) wrote about the distinction between places for children (assigned by adults for children) and children's places, places that children themselves find meaningful or significant. In this way, the relationship between how children are placed (Fog Olwin and Gullov, 2003), or how places are designed or imagined for certain constructions of childhood (Seymour, 2015), and power relations, is clear.

As Holmes and Jones (2013) point out, dominant assumptions about young children seem particularly powerful, and new thoughts concerning young children seem especially urgent. As Blaise (2016) points out, the enlightenment project to classify, order and predict the natural world encompasses children themselves, through dominant developmental psychology conceptualisations

of what children are, what they need and how they change (or “develop”) over time. These categorisations powerfully shape and limit how we as adults are able to perceive children (Holmes and Jones, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Olsson, 2013). This project of classifying and generalising childhood could be seen in parallel to Massey’s (2005) critique of maps as a colonial project to fix space, to present it as flat, complete and knowable. To turn “a movement.....into a static line” (p.108). It is worthwhile for researchers to reflect on how the theories, framings and assumptions we bring to childhood and pedagogical research may work to present children as flat, complete and knowable, as static lines.

Walking can be understood as a political act. In particular, when children and adults walk together, often children can lead the way, or shape the experience in powerful non-linguistic ways (Hackett, 2016; Weier, 2004). Phillips and Hickey (2013) describe child led tours of Fortitude Valley in Brisbane as “public pedagogy as a political act” (p. 249), as the tours highlighted both children’s competencies and the wider context of surveillance of children, in which they tend to be perceived as in danger or ‘out of place’ in public places. Somerville’s (2015) description of a different kind of walking with children, in which the journey and stopping points along the way took priority over the destination, is also pertinent here. As Rautio (2013) points out “carrying stones is political” (p.12). That is, the kinds of walking or intra acting with the material world that are not efficient (such as picking up stones for no apparent reason), that represent no discernible benefits in terms of economy or production, represent a resistance to neoliberalism.

When we accept that children make place, through their intra actions with the world, this theoretical frame disrupts assumptions about the way in which children have been placed (Fog Olwin and Gullov, 2003) or categorised within the world as part of the enlightenment project (Blaise, 2016). This understanding of place created through movement and entanglement, then, is not to accord children the kinds of powers of domination and colonisation that the humanist project has accorded to adults (Braidotti, 2013), but to understand all people, including children, as participants in the emergence of the world. Movement through place is a central aspect of this. In this way, perhaps attending to what happens between children and place would help researchers and teachers to attune to “something more, uncontrollable, indescribable, in excess, something we can taste yet always beyond whatever we might know, perceive, or ever hope to imagine” (Holmes and Jones, 2013, p.358).

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